

## Executive Summary

Over 1,100 people attended public outreach meetings sponsored by the Indiana Department of Transportation (INDOT) at seven (7) locations during summer and fall sessions in 2001 to discuss the Indiana Passenger Rail Initiative. The public response was overwhelmingly favorable of INDOT's plans examining potential high-speed rail service in Indiana. There were no detractors in any of the seven sessions. Surprisingly when the concept of using tax dollars to fund High Speed Rail came up no one raised any objections or concerns. Many of the attendees wanted to be assured that more public meetings were going to be scheduled throughout the INDOT planning horizon.

The public outreach meetings were a direct outcome of INDOT's *Rail Communication Plan*. The primary intent of the project was to conduct statewide public outreach meetings in seven (7) locations across the state to present plans and determine the level of public support for high-speed rail in Indiana. *Blalock and Brown, Inc.*, an Indianapolis based consulting firm, implemented The Rail Communication Plan.



**Figure 1: Proposed Midwest High Speed Rail Routes**

In 1996, Indiana joined nine other Midwest state Departments of Transportation (Illinois, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, Ohio, and Wisconsin), Amtrak and the Federal Railroad Administration to study the establishment of a 3,000-mile regional passenger rail system. Since then INDOT has conducted the Indiana Passenger Rail Study the Gary Indiana Alternative Rail Study, the South of The Lake Re-route Study, and is currently working on the Northern Indiana Routing Study. Each study identified alternative routes, examined challenges and opportunities,

and specified recommendations for future corridor routing decisions. This information was discussed at the public outreach meetings, and is available upon request from INDOT. INDOT's planning efforts have identified rail alternatives, and defined the next logical developmental stages, which would include preliminary environmental and engineering studies. By conducting these public outreach meetings, INDOT paused to

gather public input and assess the public's support for High Speed Rail to ensure that follow-up studies are in the public's interest.

Attendees at the Indiana Passenger Rail Initiative meetings represented a cross section of Indiana residents, business executives, industry representatives, federal/state/county/city government officials, and high-speed rail advocacy organizations. The attendance of more than 1,100 citizens exceeded expectations, as did the numerous public comments. Many individuals expressed an interest in future meetings. The meetings were held in public facilities located in Gary (7/24), Fort Wayne (8/2), South Bend (8/7), Clarksville (8/15), Indianapolis (8/21), Lawrenceburg (8/28), and Lafayette (10/16). The largest attendance was in Fort Wayne where approximately 400 people came out in support of making Fort Wayne a High Speed Rail stop and reinstituting Amtrak service to Fort Wayne.

There was media coverage at each meeting followed by several articles and editorials in Indiana newspapers. The newspaper headlines were indicative of the scores of people who attended the meetings including such statements as: *"Residents Pack Hearing to Support Service in City"* – Fort Wayne News Sentinel August 3, 2001; *"High-speed Rail Pitch Draws Overflow Crowd"* – Fort Wayne Journal Gazette August 4, 2001; *"Supporters Turn Out for High-speed Rail System"* – Elkhart Truth August 8, 2001. Several Indiana residents, local government, and business officials presented prepared comments at the meetings. In one case in particular, the Tippecanoe County Board of Commissioners actually adopted Resolution No. 2001-17-CM showing local support for enhanced passenger rail connections. The public outreach meetings also included information on the Indiana components of the Midwest Regional High Speed Rail System including: 1) Chicago through Indianapolis to Cincinnati and Louisville, 2) Chicago to Cleveland, and 3) Chicago to Detroit.

The public comments, questions and survey responses can generally be categorized as follows:

- High speed rail should be implemented sooner not later
- Elected Officials should support rail as they do highways
- Rail service should be affordable and accessible
- Crossing safety should be studied and solutions funded within any project
- More opportunities for public input should be provided
- Proceed – Why is it taking so long?
- There should be a stop in my town
- Rail alternatives cost less than highway projects
- Rail offers great economic development opportunities
- Implementation should include intercity connections and connections to other modes of transportation
- Restore and Improve Amtrak Service
- Rail is an environmentally friendly mode of transportation
- Rail transportation in the U.S. is inadequate when compared to that in Europe and Japan

Meeting attendees represented a cross-section of the population reflecting diversity at each of the meeting locations. Included in the audiences were representatives from local planning organizations, officials responsible for business development, local tourism organizations, local and regional elected officials, retired persons, and the media. As a whole the median income of the attendees was between \$30,000 - \$50,000, and many individuals had utilized passenger rail either in the US or abroad. The audiences were fairly balanced representing all genders, races, ages, and other socio-economic characteristics.

Questions and statements made in the seven public outreach meetings held by INDOT in 2001 reinforce the Indiana Passenger Rail Initiative study conclusions. That is,

- More and more people are interested in choosing rail as an alternative to driving or air travel
- The highway system in most major metropolitan areas is congested, and building more highways or adding additional travel lanes is a costly solution
- Air travel is less cost-effective for short to medium trips and is increasingly inconvenient
- Until recently, utilization of intercity bus service has seen a spiraling decline (the level of multi-modal feeder systems to support High speed rail was a concern expressed in each location)

This Final Report of the Indiana Rail Communication Plan is intended to document the comprehensive efforts that were implemented to engage the citizens of Indiana in public outreach meetings. The results of the public outreach meetings are described by location in the following chapters. There were 400 surveys collected from the 1,150 attendees; these surveys are available from INDOT. In addition to the surveys, a comment and question period was held at the end of each meeting. These statements are contained within the meeting summaries that follow,

Overall, the Indiana Rail Communication Plan successfully generated public awareness of INDOT's previous, current and future direction in developing the Indiana Passenger Rail Initiative – Taking a Bold Track Into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

## **The Rail Communication Plan**

The Indiana Department of Transportation's *Rail Communication Plan* project was conceived as a means to gauge public interests in maintaining/enhancing the current Indiana passenger rail system and connecting to the designated corridors in the Midwest Regional Rail System. The Plan encompasses the process and methodologies used to ensure the statewide public outreach initiative was successful. The project mission links the intent with the desired output: *To introduce the general public to the Indiana Passenger Rail Initiative and the Midwest Regional Rail System, and generate discussion regarding applicable rail corridors in Indiana including: Chicago through Indianapolis to Cincinnati and Louisville, Chicago to Cleveland, Chicago to Detroit.*

The Rail Communication Plan also included the following tasks: 1) Research current passenger rail plans in Indiana and develop into presentation materials; 2) Conduct public outreach meetings in Gary, South Bend, Fort Wayne, Lafayette, Indianapolis, Clarksville, and Lawrenceburg; 3) Conduct and analyze the results of the Question and Answer sessions, and the Survey Questionnaire distributed during the public meetings; 4) Create and distribute public information to all parties addressing individual requests, and providing strategic information over the INDOT website; 5) Implement innovative means of reaching minority persons and/or individuals in low-income classifications; 6) Create a database of persons interested in transportation and passenger rail service in Indiana. Samples of the meeting notice, press release and information handouts are included in the appendix of this report. It is important to mention that the database includes over 1,800 contacts that were either already on INDOT mailing lists or added as they expressed an interest in being notified of activities relating to passenger rail in Indiana.

### **Methodology and Approach**

The Rail Communication Plan encompassed the following major tasks: Research/Analysis of previously conducted rail planning/alternatives studies; Public Outreach Meetings with a defined focus on including low-income and minority populations, and creating a Database of Contacts. Each of these tasks is further defined below as are specific observations viewed relevant in identifying subsequent actions.

### **Research/Analysis**

At the beginning of this process, the Consultant conducted an extensive review of the studies conducted for the Midwest Regional Rail Initiative (*Strategic Assessment and Business Plan published in July 2000*), and the Indiana Department of Transportation (*Indiana Passenger Rail Study published May 2000*, and the *Gary Indiana Alternative Rail Study published February 2000*). The studies mentioned in this report can be obtained from the Indiana Department of Transportation.

## Public Outreach Meetings

The Communication Plan called for seven (7) community meetings to be held. The locations were Gary (7/24), Fort Wayne (8/2), South Bend (8/7), Clarksville (8/15), Indianapolis (8/21), Lawrenceburg (8/28), and Lafayette (10/16). Over 1,100 people attended these meetings with the greatest number (400) showing up in Fort Wayne, and voicing overwhelming support for a High Speed Rail stop and Amtrak service to be restored to the Fort Wayne area. The attendance breakdown by location is as follows:

City	Date	Location	Attendance
Gary	7/24/01	Gary City Building Council Chambers 401 Broadway Gary, Indiana	125
Fort Wayne	8/2/01	Allen County Public Library 900 Webster Street Fort Wayne, Indiana	400
South Bend	8/7/01	Mishawaka Penn-Harris Library 209 Lincoln Way East Mishawaka, Indiana	110
Clarksville	8/15/01	Clarksville Public Library 1312 Eastern Boulevard Clarksville, Indiana	80
Indianapolis	8/21/01	Glendale Mall Library Indianapolis, Indiana	225
Lawrenceburg	8/28/01	Lawrenceburg Public Library 123 W. High Street Lawrenceburg, Indiana	60
Lafayette	10/16/01	Lafayette Depot @ Riehle Plaza 200 North Second Street Lafayette, Indiana	150

Press Releases, special mailings to individuals on the INDOT and Indiana High Speed Rail Association contact lists, website announcements, presentations at stakeholder advocacy group meetings, and word of mouth communication techniques were used. Together these methods yielded record attendance numbers that astounded most parties, and likely had some affect on the obvious show of support for passenger rail in Indiana.

The meetings were scheduled from 5:00pm – 7:00pm, portions of the audience stayed on after the close of the meetings to make comments and ask questions. The agenda included a formal presentation with a variety of Indiana and regional maps defining specific routes to points in Indiana and connecting states in the Midwest Regional Rail network. Information about general vehicle technology, passenger amenities and service levels was also presented. The meetings included a time for public comments and questions as well as final remarks from INDOT on the next logical steps that could be implemented.

The responses from attendees were overwhelmingly supportive of INDOT efforts. The attendees wanted INDOT to continue with plans for preliminary engineering and environmental studies. Comments from highway transportation industry advocates cautioned the audience to consider balance – meaning, no one mode of transportation should suffer at the hand of developing another. In addition to the comments raised, there were a number of questions about how to encourage elected officials to increase operating, funding, and political support for passenger rail transportation. Survey questionnaires were also distributed to each attendee. Attendance was across the board – varying ages, gender, occupations, and salary levels. Many attendees were either currently using passenger rail or interested in having it available as an alternative to the automobile or air transportation modes.